



BEHDĪNĀN DIALECT

BEHDĪNĀN DIALECT, a [Central dialect](#) spoken by the Behdīnān “the people of the Good Religion,” i.e., Zoroastrianism, who live in, or came from, the cities of Kermān and Yazd and surrounding towns and villages. It used to be called *darī* by themselves, and *Gabrī* by outsiders (Behdīnān *gawr* “man, Zoroastrian,” Persian *gabr* “infidel, fireworshipper”).

This dialect is a member of the continuum of the Central dialects, but also shows influence from other dialect groups and is most similar to, but distinct from, the Jewish dialect of Yazd and Kermān. There are local differences on all levels of grammar and in the lexicon, which have been subject to a leveling process due to influence from Persian, most directly from the local vernacular of the Muslim population. At the same time, there is increasing differentiation and language loss among emigrants to major urban centers, to the West, and to India.

By 1975, there were about 25,000 Zoroastrians in Iran, 19,000 of them in Tehran, some 4,000 in and around Yazd. By the mid-1980s, there were fewer than 20,000, with virtually none left in Kermān. Recently attempts are being made to establish classes for children in this dialect in Tehran and abroad.

Phonology. Consonants. Typical “Northwestern” features: preservation of initial *y = y, e.g., K(ermāni) Y(azdi) *yoma* “garment, cloth,” Y. *ya* “barley”; initial *w = v, w, e.g., K. *vāj*, Y. *voj* “to say”; *arz and *ard, e.g., Y. *darz* “crevice, seam,” Y. *barda* “spade” (but *rz > l in *mrzu > K.Y. *mol* “neck”).



Earlier and more recent changes: Aryan palatals *ś, ź > s, z, e.g., *kas* “small,” K. *zōmād*, Y. *zomod* “son-in-law.” Iranian *św, źw > *sp*, *zb* > *sW*, *zW*, e.g., K. *saba*, Y. *sva*, “dog,” K.Y. *z(o)vūn* “tongue”; *hw > *xw* > *x*, e.g., K. *xow*, Y. *xarm* “sleep,” initial *dw > *b*, e.g., K.Y. *bedi* “other, again”; *θr, fr > (:)*r*, e.g., K. *po(o)rer*, Y. *po(o)r* “son, boy” (but note *čaθrušva > K. *taspuč*, Y. *tasuž/j* “1/4”), Y. *herdo* “tomorrow”; *xC* > (:)*C*, e.g., *hrīn* “to buy,” K. *doter*, Y. *dot* “girl”; also *hC/Ch* and “*C/C*” > (:)*C*, e.g., *tanhā* > K. *te(e)nā*, Y. *te(e)ni/u* “alone,” *šam* > K. *ša(a)m*, Y. *še(e)m* “candle”; *āh* > *a(:)*, e.g., *rāh* > K. *ra(a)*, Y. *ra* “way.”

F before strident > *w*, e.g., Y. *čaws* “to stick to”; *bC/V#* > *w/v*, e.g., Y. *avr* “cloud,” K. *cū*, Y. *cuv* “wood”; *d* is retained after original long vowel, e.g., Y. *gudar* “calf,” *nād* > K. Y. *ned* “reed,” *rōd* > Y. *rud* “bronze.”

St, *zd*, and *nd* > *s(s)*, *z(z)*, *n(n)*, e.g., *pes(s)u* “closet,” *giz(z)um* “scorpion,” *gen(n)um* “wheat.”

Limited changes: **km* > *šm* > *hm* > *m*, only in **čašman* > K. *čam*, Y. *čem* “eye”; *š* > *s* mainly before causative suffix, e.g., *tarāš-ān* > K.Y. *toros-n* “to shave, scratch.” Confined to a few words each: *s* > *š*, e.g., K.Y. *dašt* “hand,” K.Y. *bašt* “tied”; initial *j* > *y*, e.g., K. *yen* “woman,” K.Y. *yovīd* “chewed”; and, mainly in Yazdi: intervocalic *m* > *w*, e.g., Y. *zwin* “earth,” Arabic *tamām* > Y. *tawum* “complete”; initial *x* > *h* before high vowels, e.g., Y. *hormu* “date.” Y. general: initial *f* and *ft* > *p/pt*, e.g., K. *pānūs*, Y. *penus* “lantern,” K. *graft*, Y. *grapt* “took”; initial *āC* > Y. *w-oC-*, e.g., K. *āw*, Y. *wow* “water.”

Vowels. The subdialects show considerable variation. In Yazdi the opposition is tense-lax, rather than long-short. Lax vowels: *a* > mid-front position before nasals and *rV*, e.g., *band* > K.Y. *bend* “to tie,” K.Y. *ager* “if”; *i*, *u* are conditionally lowered, e.g., K.Y. *mes* “copper,” K. *borzī* “height.” Tense vowels: Originally long *ā* is strongly rounded and conditionally raised to high-mid *o*, notably in Yazdi (often recorded as *u*), e.g., Y. *boi-bend* “amulet,” K. *sāl*, Y. *sol* “year.” *ĀN* is raised, generally K. *oN*, Y. *uN*, e.g., K. *zōmād*, Y. *zomod* “son-in-law.” Earlier *ē*, *ō* are preserved mainly before sibilants, but shortened, e.g., Y. *reša* “tassels,” K.Y. *goš* “ear,” and merge with *i*, *u* elsewhere; but note variations, e.g., K. *sped/spīt*, Y. *svid* “white.”

Behdīnān *ū* (< **ū*, *ō*) > *ī* before dentals, and often in final position, e.g., K.Y. *dīr* “far,” *pa(a)lī* “side,” *sātūr* > K. *sātīr*, Y. *sotir* “cleaver.” Note fronting/shortening of *āN* in a few verbs, e.g., K.Y. present stem *mīn*, preterite stem *men* “to remain,” and mainly in K. *ā* > *ī* in Arabic loans of the form *CeCāC*, e.g., *ketāb* >



ketīb “book.”

Initial clusters are notably found in Yazdi. Earlier clusters tend not to insert a vowel, e.g., K. *brār*, Y. *d(e)ver* “brother,” K. *dern*, Y. *drin* “to cut,” K. *estāra*, Y. *sora* “star,” and unstressed vowels tend to be elided before nasals, liquids, and semivowels, e.g., *fetīle* > Y. *plite* “wick.” Note K. *keda*, Y. *xda* “house,” K. *pedar*, Y. *bder* “father” and K. *beda*, Y. *(e)bda* “been,” K. *šeda*, Y. *(e)šda* “gone.”

Morphology (examples from Yazdi, unless marked K(ermāni); tense-lax distinction not marked). *Noun and noun phrase*. Human plural: generally *-ún*, but also the general marker *-(h)ó*, e.g., *ziyūn-[ún]* “the women,” *xodi noker-[ó]* “with the servants.” Reference-deixis: *é*, e.g., *dot-og-é* “the girl (talked about),” *miye vačag-un-é* “these children.” Indefiniteness: *yak-i* + noun, e.g., *yak-i ruj* “some, one day,” but also *-i*.

Dependent nominals: N1 *-i*– N2/Adjective (*-i* generally elided after vowel), e.g., *por-og-un-i xad-om* “my own sons.” Comparative: *-ter* (often omitted), e.g., *šaw [dir-ø] bo az her ruj* “That night he was later than any other day.”

Chart 1. Pronouns: Independent and prenominal.

(K. *v-in* “he/she,” *v-īyā* “they, those,” *mīyā* “these,” *v-īsūn* “these.”) *Min* is now generally replaced by *mo yaki*. The affixes precede the finite verb when functioning as agent in past tenses and as direct or indirect object (*o* elided after vowel and before imperfective *et* and preposition *e*), e.g., *[oš]-vot* “[He] said,” *[š]-e-vot* “[He] was saying,” *[mo]-pron-en* “They take [us];” *[om]-nat-i-y-e* “You are not giving (it) [to me].”

The preposition *e* “in, at, to, from” (elided after vowel of plural affixes), by functional extension peculiar to Behdīnān, is preposed to verbal complements, e.g., *azyoga-š [e belend] šo* “He got [up] from his place.” The affixes in any function precede such phrases, e.g., *čemuš [e po]-om nabo* > *čemuš m-[e po] nabo* “There were no shoes on my feet”; *xodo-ro [e šokr] oš-et-kart* > *xdo-ro š [e šokr] e-ka* “He was thanking God”; *hokm [e košt-en-i on] od-i-kard-a* > *hokm d-[e košt-en-i on] i-kard-a* “You have given the order for killing/beating him.”

Other prepositions: *ado/xad(o)*, “with, to,” *az* “from,” *be* “to,” *bri* “for,” *veš* “side, to.”

The specifying-referential postposition *ro*: reference, e.g., *[tojer-i-ro]*, *vaxt-i ki var šekast-a ba, hezor tomun qarz oš-došt* “ [(As) to a certain merchant) when



he went bankrupt, he had a debt of 1000 toman”; extension, e.g., K. [*mo šav é ro*] *xuft-en* “They slept [(for) this night] “; indirect object, e.g., [*podešo-ro*] *došnum e-voj-a* “He is telling insults, is insulting [to the king] “; direct object, e.g., *me* [*o-ro*] *xomuš e-kr-e* “I will extinguish [that one] ,” but may be omitted in the presence of personal affixes. It may also mark “logical” direct objects in overtly non-active constructions, such as indirect verbs, e.g., [*vača-ro*] *om-na-va-t-e* “I do not want [the child] “ (lit. “to me is wanted”), passive, e.g., [*me-ro*] *farzand-i ta xenod-a ve-b-e* “that [I] be called your child,” past tenses of transitive verbs, e.g., [*podešo-i-ro*] *hama , šo-ašnuft ki ...* “All have heard [(of) that certain king] who”

The verb system. This is typically West Iranian, based on present and past stems. The perfect participle is derived from the past stem by *-a*, e.g., *kart-a* “done,” verbal noun Y. *-wun*, K. mostly *-mūn*, e.g., K. *dādmūn*, Y. *dodwun* “giving.” Causatives are derived from the present stem by *-n*, with regular past stem in *-od*, e.g., *sej/sot* “to burn” > *suj-n/sqi-n-od* “(to cause) to burn.”

Directional prefixes: *ar-* “up,” e.g., *ar-vez* “to jump up,” *bar-* “out,” e.g., *bar-o* “to come out”; *var-* “on,” e.g., *var-ker* “to put on”; *pe-* “back,” e.g., *pe-gor* “to take back”; *hem-*, e.g., *hem-t-ošt* “to stand up” (Ahuric), *hem-par* “to stand up” (Ahrimanic). *A-*, *va-*, and *u-* (originally “to, forth,” “away, again,” and “down”) are retained only in imperative and subjunctive, e.g., *á-ben* “tie!,” but *e-ben-e* “I am tying,” *ú-nig* “sit down!,” but *me e-nig-e* “I am sitting down.”

Subjunctive-imperative prefix *bi* > *ve*, *we* before consonant, and other prefixes are mutually exclusive. Prohibitive prefix *ma* and negative prefix *na* are inserted between directional prefix and verb, e.g., *ar-e-gor-en* “They are holding up,” but note *ar-ma-ve-z/m-ar-vez* “Don’t jump up.” With stative perfectives, *na-* precedes the forms of “to be,” e.g., *ne-i-omd-e* “I have not come” vs. *umda ne-e* “I “am” not come.”

Imperfective prefix *et-*, *e* elided after vowel, *t* before consonant, e.g., *xadumiet-pahm-en va et-o-en* > *xadum*[*i-ø ø -p*]*a(:)m-env*[*a ø t-o*]-*en* “Some will understand and come”; but clitic *-e* if negative, e.g., [*et*]-*o-t* “He is coming,” vs. *n-o-t*[*e*] “He is not coming”; *-e* may be added to the imperfective past, e.g., *me mo kor-e m[e(t)]-kart-[e]* “I was doing this job,” negative *me mo kor-e m-na-kart-[e]* “I was not doing this job.”

Non-stative perfective *-i-* may be attached to negation *na*, e.g., *š-[i]-ne-[i]-wort-a* “He has not brought”; it is fully absorbed in Y. *ebda* “been, become,” Y.



ešta “gone,” and K. *inda* “come.”

Chart 2. Person and number.

3rd singular *-t* after original semivowel, e.g., *e-šu-t* “goes”; *-it* with a few intransitives, e.g., *e-min-it* “remains.” Note *es-it* “fallen” in a number of compounds, e.g., Y. *teb/tog/gaw e-s-it* “is fallen down,” also “burnt down.” 1st and 3rd singular *-em* and *-et* before the imperfective clitic *-e* in negatives, e.g., *e-kr-e* vs. *na-kr-em-e* “I do/do not do,” but Y. also *na-ras-e* “He doesn’t arrive.”

3rd person clitic *-it* is now obsolete, e.g., *in mu-n -it* “this is,” *miye ke-n -it* “Who are they?”

2nd singular imperative is zero, but postvocalic *-n*, e.g., *a-te-n* “give!,” note **awar* > *bi-ur-e* “come!” (by analogy also in *bi-u-r-e* “be!,” *ve-šu-r-e* “go!” in some villages near Kermān).

Ergative. In past tenses of transitive verbs, the agent is expressed by the personal affix, and the verb ending is 3rd singular, but is occasionally coreferential with the direct object, e.g., *du-bor-a šo-gir i-venod[-im]* “They have caught us again, we have been caught again” (3rd plural agent affix *šo*, 1st plural ending *-im*).

Aspect: imperfective, perfective, and aorist (usually called “preterit”), e.g., *eze [šo-e]* “[I went] yesterday,” *erdo ke [šo-e]*, *kule-i hizma-ro veš-ter e-ken-e* “Tomorrow when [I go], I will pull out more of that fire-wood.”

Mood: indicative and non-indicative, the latter distinguishing subjunctive and counterfactual, and imperative.

Tense: present, past, inferential past, i.e., second-hand knowledge, conclusion, and reminiscence, e.g., *čun noker -od me(:)nat-i qarq bodvun š-[e-ne-i-zunod-a], vo qadr-i kašti-ro š-[e fa(:)m i-ne-i-kart-ibd-a]* “(He is quiet now) because your servant [evidently did not know] the threat of drowning and [evidently had not understood] the value of the ship” (Persian *na-mī-dānest-a ast, fahm na-kard-a būd-a ast*). Note the inferential perfective subjunctive *me rasod-a ehd-a b-e* “that I evidently have arrived.”

The basic verb system is shown in [Table 5](#).

The progressive form is expressed by *dor/dort* or *došt* “to keep, have,” followed



by the imperfective, e.g., present: *me [dor-e] (e)-š-e* “I am going,” past: *me [dort-e] (e)-šo-y-e* “I was going”; with transitive verb: *me [dort-e] m-e-pars-od* “I was asking.”

In modal periphrasis the modal verb is in the 3rd singular, and the affected person marked by the personal affix.

“To want, wish, like”: imperfective of *va*, *e-wu-t/e-vyost* (negative: *na-va-t-e/na-vyost-e*), followed by the subjunctive, e.g., *kumi-(ro) d-[e-vu-t]* “Which one do you want?” *š[e-vyost] kiš-e rosvo ve-kr-e* “He wanted to expose him.” Note the occasional personal ending in Kermāni, e.g., *me xayli raz-ro m-e-wu-t-[en]* “I like grapes very much.”

“Must”: *vau-t/vyost(e)*, negative: *na-u-t/na-vyost(-e)*, followed by the past stem and clitic *-e*, e.g., *oš-[vau-t ort-e]* “He must bring,” *oš-vod ke bdi meydun-i asp-davun-i [na-u-t oma-e]* “He said that he should, must not again come to the racecourse.”

“Can”: *ša/šost-e* or *šod-e*, negative Y. *na-ša*, K. *na-še/na-šast-e*, followed by the past stem with subject endings; e.g., *mo [ša šinod]-im* “We can hear,” K. *mā mō-[na-šast-e košt]-īm gap-i ajamī-ro* “We have not been able to talk Persian,” K. *šumā dō-[šast-e košt]-īt gap-i ajamī-ro* “You were not able to speak Persian.” Also, imperfective forms of *tun/tunod* or *tunast*, e.g., *om-[na-tunast(-e)] bi-or-e* “I could not bring it.”

Possibility: *ša/šost-e* followed by *kart*, the subject ending, and the subjunctive, e.g., K. *me [ša kart]-e bi-ō-e* “I can, may come,” K. *me me-[na-šast-e kart]-e gap-i ajamī ve-kud-e* “I was not able to speak Persian.”

Passive: Inflected forms of both *šod-wun* “to go” and *umod-wun* “to come,” following the past stem, e.g., *ret [e-šu-t]* “it is getting spilled,” *taxt-i e čumuš sovid [ešt-a]* “The sole is worn away”; *mart [et-o-t]* “It is being broken,” *po-š mart [i-umd-a bo]* “His foot had been broken.” The Persian construction with participle + “to become” is found as well.

Periphrastic causative: participle + *kar-*, e.g., *va xudo har-če [oparid-a kart-a bo]*, *oš-did ki miye besyor xub-en* “And God, whatever things he had created, he saw that they were very good. “

Parataxis and subordination follow the pattern of Persian.



See also: ZOROASTRIANS OF IRAN. vi. Linguistic Documentation (in preparation).

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Dr. Michael Simmons, director of the Center for Zoroastrian Research, Bloomington, Indiana, provided observations and information on the Zoroastrian community and checked linguistic problems with a number of native speakers of the dialect.

Search terms:

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